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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 3786
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 1885
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 5774
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3511
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 2782
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 4836
RUEAEP/AMEMBASSY HQ EPA WASHDC
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SUBJECT: Jordan Prepares for Potential Summer Drought - Again

REF: A) Amman 228
B) 07 Rome 2518
C) 07 Amman 668
D) 06 Amman 8401

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1. (SBU) Summary: The Secretaries General of the Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MWI) and the Jordan Valley Authority conveyed to ESTH Officer in separate January 24 meetings a clear sense of an impending summer water crisis. Lower than average rainfall has led to Jordanian dams being filled at 37% of capacity as of January 24 -- roughly 11.5% lower than 2007. (A January 29-31 blizzard in Jordan increased dam capacity to 40.5%.) The MWI expects it highly likely that it will need to declare a drought by early March in preparation for a summer crisis. Drought control measures could include additional water rationing, reducing irrigation (reducing water for agriculture), and buying water from private wells/farm-units. Water tariffs, which include subsidies for agricultural use, are likely to increase to cover MWI's operational and maintenance costs. MWI further applauded the improved political climate for discussion of contentious water allocation issues with Syria (ref A). It is unlikely, however, that Syria can help relieve Jordan's summer drought since Syria itself is facing acute water shortages. End summary.

A Dry Country Grows Increasingly Drier

2. (U) Jordan, one of the driest countries in the world, has long been suffering from a critical water resource crisis (ref D). Moreover, the 2007-2008 winter has not been kind to Jordan. As of January 24, 2008 Jordanian dams were filled at 37% of capacity - a total of 79.46 million cubic meters (MCM) out of a total capacity of 217.9 MCM. (If one included the 110 MCM Unity dam - which is only filled at 10 MCM - this figure would be even lower at 27% of capacity (ref C)). In comparison, on January 24, 2007, the dams were filled at 105.57 MCM or 48.4% of capacity. The 11.5% decrease represents a serious threat to Jordan's ability to cope with the summer demand. Typically, the rainy winter provided Jordan the respite to increase its water resources to cope with increased

summer demand. Despite a heavy, sustained snowfall from January 29-31 which added roughly 7MCM or 3.5% to Jordan's dams, the season has been dry and the risk of a summer drought remains significant.

Summer Drought

13. (SBU) MWI Secretary General Khaldoun Khashman believes it highly likely that Jordan will need to declare a summer drought if the dams' water storage continue to lag behind 2007 levels. The decision on declaring a summer drought, to be made by GOJ stakeholders who meet on a monthly basis to review water resources, will likely occur early next month. (MWI noted that the last "official" drought was declared 6-7 years ago.) Drought measures would include increased water rationing (most parts of Amman currently get water 1-2 days/week which fills storage tanks); reducing the water delivery for agricultural use to 30-35% of normal levels; and, MWI buying water from private well owners to cover municipal water requirements.

14. (SBU) Khashman noted that in case of a summer drought, there could be additional financial repercussions for the GOJ which is already struggling to pay for three months of subsidies for petroleum products and barley, an expense it had hoped to eliminate at the start of the year. Landowners in the Jordan Valley often have water rights that accompany their farmland. If their water resources are reduced during a drought, they might seek compensation from the GOJ. NOTE: Khashman is referring to the customary practice of the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) delivering water based upon cropping patterns. A farmer has no right to water until he plants a crop. Once the crop is in the ground the JVA is obligated to deliver water to the crop. If water is insufficient for all crops planted, the JVA has to compensate farmers who do not receive water -- in effect buy out the crop. This is not specified in the JVA law, but there are cases wherein farmers have taken the JVA to court and won a judgment. In recent years JVA has paid without litigation. END NOTE.

No Shortage of Problems

15. (SBU) The GOJ currently subsidizes the agricultural sector which consumes 65% of Jordan's water resources while contributing less than 3% of GDP. JVA Secretary General Mousa Jamani defended the need to allocate water for agriculture, highlighting that half a million people in the Jordan valley rely on water allocations and farming for their sustenance. Without this livelihood, they would likely migrate and further strain the infrastructure of big cities like Amman. NOTE: Many farms in the Jordan Valley use treated wastewater for irrigation. The highlands, however, use predominantly fresh water resources. END NOTE. Jamani noted that the 10 MCM provided for industry is currently billed at \$0.78/cubic meter (cm), whereas the blended rate that most Jordan Valley farmers pay is \$0.00035/cm. The JVA is planning to raise its tariff structure in 2008 to be able to cover all its operational costs. (The Amman residential water rate is \$0.7/cm for the first 20 cm, and \$2.1/cm for any additional water usage.) Jamani believes that through frequent outreach, most farmers are prepared for and will accept a tariff increase.

16. (SBU) Human resource issues also plague the MWI. Relatively low government salaries, coupled with the pull of the Gulf countries seeking technical and managerial skills, have led to an exodus of talent from the MWI. Khashman bemoaned the brain drain from his ministry noting, "even bad people get other jobs." The problem directly affects the many donors (including USAID) who provide capacity building for the water sector as the people they train often leave within a few months.

Cooperation with Syria, Israel, and the Palestinians

17. (SBU) MWI applauded the improved political climate for discussion on contentious water allocation issues with Syria. The Jordan-Syria water committee meets every three months, while technical officials meet on a monthly basis. It is unlikely Syria can help relieve Jordan's summer drought since Syria itself is facing acute water shortages. Khashman estimated that Syrian dams are filled at only

30% of capacity. With USG support, MWI also continues its cooperation with Israel and the Palestinians on technical water issues through the EXACT Water Data Banks project (ref B). Under the 1994 Peace Treaty, Jordan stores 20 MCM of excess water in Lake Tiberias every winter and Israel returns to Jordan this water less evaporation losses every summer. Over the last few years Jordan has not been able to fill its winter storage capacity, but nonetheless, has kept receiving the summer allocations from Israel. NOTE: Under the Peace Treaty, Jordan is entitled to 10 MCM of desalinated water from Israel from a desalination unit to be completed by Israel. The desalinated water has never been supplied but Israel is obligated by the treaty to supply Jordan the water regardless. End Note.

Rivulets of Hope

18. (SBU) The MWI has several initiatives underway to balance water demand and water supply: reduce administrative and physical water leakages (already reduced from 53% to 42% with a target of an additional 2-3% reduction annually); increase use of wastewater resources; discontinue the issuance of new licenses for agricultural wells; outsource billing and improve efficiencies; strengthen water demand management efforts; and use new technologies such as meters which can transmit data wirelessly for monitoring water usage in private wells. USAID (the biggest donor in Jordan's water sector with over \$500 million over the last 10 years) and several other donors continue to play a key role in assisting MWI in its efforts. USAID's water resources office recently held an offsite retreat with key MWI management to discuss joint activities. Septel will outline

recent USG initiatives and achievements in supporting Jordan's water resources management.

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